

# Poll: Confidence in Supreme Court has collapsed since conservatives took control

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A new Yahoo News/YouGov poll shows that Americans' confidence in the U.S. Supreme Court **has collapsed over the last 20 months** — a period that began with former President Donald Trump and Senate Republicans installing a 6-3 conservative majority ahead of the 2020 election and culminated last week with the leak of a draft opinion signaling that five GOP-appointed justices plan to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

The last time Yahoo News/YouGov asked about confidence in the court was in September 2020, a few days after liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died and a few days before Trump nominated

conservative jurist Amy Coney Barrett to replace her. **Back then, 70% of registered voters said they had either “some” (50%) or “a lot” (20%) of confidence in the court**, and 30% said they had either “a little” (23%) or “none” (7%).

But the new survey of 1,577 U.S. adults, which was conducted immediately after the leak, found that registered voters have swung from mostly having confidence in the Supreme Court — by a colossal 40-point margin — to being evenly split on the question. Today, just half of voters still express some (37%) or a lot (14%) of confidence in the court, **while the other half now expresses either a little (24%) or none (26%).**

And among all Americans — as opposed to just registered voters — most (53%) now say they have either no confidence in the Supreme Court (28%) or only a little (25%).

**Views on key aspects of American life rarely shift that suddenly. The question is why.**

On May 5, Chief Justice John Roberts blasted the leak of Justice Samuel Alito's opinion, calling it “absolutely appalling” and saying *he hopes “one bad apple” will not change “people’s perception” of the nation’s highest court*. Many Republican politicians have also framed the breach of protocol — rather than the momentous opinion it revealed, or the overall direction of the court — as **a threat that could “severely damage” the institution**. Roberts has ordered the court’s marshal, Col. Gail A. Curley, to investigate what happened.



*Judge Samuel Alito in 2006 before he was confirmed to the Supreme Court. (Susan Walsh/AP)*

But the new Yahoo News/YouGov poll suggests that **the leak itself may not be the Supreme Court’s main problem**. For starters, Americans are divided over whether the leak is a “good thing” (30%), a “bad thing” (37%) or something they’re not sure about (33%). Second, **politics is clearly playing a part here**. Driven by an assumption that **the leaker was “pro-choice” (38%)** rather than “pro-life” (20%) — an assumption that has yet to be confirmed — far more Republicans consider the leak bad (59%) than good (19%), and far more Democrats consider it good (50%) than bad (20%).

**The ideological shift of the Supreme Court may be the bigger issue.** In September 2020, 29% of registered voters saw the court as either “conservative” (25%) or “very conservative” (4%). Today, that

combined number is 44%, with nearly six times as many voters as before saying “very conservative” (22%). Among registered voters who are Democrats, the share who say “conservative” or “very conservative” has shot up from 42% to 58%; among independents, it has jumped from 29% to 41%; and even among Republicans it has risen from 16% to 31%. The overall share of registered voters who describe the court as “moderate” has fallen nearly 10 points over the same period, to 30%.

At the same time, confidence in the Supreme Court has taken a hit across the board, declining 25 points among Democrats (to 39%), 20 points among independents (to 48%) and 11 points among Republicans (to 71%). A full three-quarters of registered voters (74%) now think **the court has become “too politicized”** (up from 67% in September 2020), with roughly equal increases in perceptions of politicization among Democrats (up from 69% to 75%), independents (up from 70% to 76%) and Republicans (up from 65% to 73%).

It isn't hard to explain why Democrats (78% of whom believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases) and independents (54% of whom believe the same) have turned against the court; they are by and large less conservative than the justices who now control it. That also explains why the number of Democrats (65%) and independents (49%) who disapprove of the job the court is doing has doubled since September 2020. But here's the thing: The number of *Republicans* who disapprove of the job the Supreme Court is doing has jumped as well, from just 17% then to 29% today. Incidentally, **31% of Republicans also believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases** — suggesting that the current majority of justices may be too conservative for them too.

Likewise, more Americans say they view the **four justices who have reportedly voted against overturning *Roe v. Wade*** favorably than unfavorably: Justice Sonia Sotomayor (37% favorable vs. 27% unfavorable); Justice Elena Kagan (32% favorable vs. 23% unfavorable); Justice Stephen Breyer (33% favorable vs. 22% unfavorable); and Chief Justice Roberts (32% favorable to 28% unfavorable). In contrast, all five of the conservative justices who have reportedly voted to overturn *Roe* are viewed more unfavorably than favorably. So while politicization is a problem that everyone seems to recognize, and bemoan, declining confidence in the court probably has less to do with protocol than policy. A growing number of Americans — Democrats, independents and even some Republicans — disapprove of the Supreme Court for the simple reason that they disagree with its new direction.